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NOTES ON MELIERAX WITH DESCRIPTION
OF A NEW FORM.

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The African hawks of the genus *Melierax* have been variously treated by different authors. Swann (Monogr. Bds. of Prey, pt. 3, 1925, pp. 165-171) considers *metabates*, *neumanni*, *poliopterus*, and *mechowi* as races of *musicus*. Hartert (Vög. der Palaärkt. Fauna, 2, pp. 1164-1165) does substantially the same, using the specific name *canorus*, since abandoned in favor of *musicus*, while Sclater (Syst. Av. Ethiop., 1924, pp. 71-72) considers *musicus*, *metabates*, and *poliopterus* as separate species. On the other hand, van Someren (Novit. Zool., xxix, 1922, p. 39) considers *poliopterus* specifically distinct from *musicus*, but places *metabates* as a race of the latter because, "* * * apparently *M. poliopterus* and *M. metabates* are found in the same countries." Swann (*cit. supra*) doubts the occurrence of both together, but there can no longer be any question that they do occur in the same places.

Recently in working over the specimens of *Melierax* collected by the late Col. Edgar A. Mearns I found that he had taken both *poliopterus* and *metabates* in the same or adjacent localities. It therefore seems that these two are specifically distinct, but it is more natural to consider the latter specifically distinct from *musicus* as well, and the former a race of *musicus*, rather than vice versa as van Someren has done. Both *musicus* and *poliopterus* have pure white upper tail coverts, whereas *metabates* has these feathers barred. Of course, it might be argued that the secondaries are a better taxonomic character than the upper tail coverts, in which case van Someren's treatment would be the more proper, as both *musicus* and *metabates* have these feathers finely vermiculated, while in *poliopterus* they are uniformly gray. However, while it is true that the wing coverts and secondaries of *metabates* are usually vermiculated or freckled with white or grayish-white, there are several cases on record where these feathers are

uniform in coloration. This variation appears to be entirely an individual matter; it is certainly not correlated with age, season, sex, wear, or locality. About ten per cent of the birds have practically no vermiculations, but the lightness and abundance of the markings in the rest is by no means uniform. Every gradation occurs from no vermiculations at all to such abundance of markings that the folded wings seem markedly lighter than the back. Likewise Swann (*cit. supra*) writes that *poliopterus* sometimes shows the freckling on the wings. The upper tail coverts seem to be a more constant character and the birds should be arranged accordingly. The large species of *Melierax*¹ would then stand as follows:

- A. Upper tail coverts barred.....*metabates* and races.
 AA. Upper tail coverts white, unbarred.....*musicus* and races.

Melierax musicus has two races, the typical, southern form, and the eastern, tropical *poliopterus*, which is smaller in size.

Melierax metabates has three described races:—the typical northeast African form, the race *neumanni* (Blue Nile and White Nile to Lake Chad and the Nigerian border of the French Sudan) characterized by its smaller size, the freckling on the wings concentrated more or less into bars, tail coverts less barred; and the form *mechowi* (Angola to Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo) characterized by its generally darker color. However, there seems to be still another race, hitherto unrecognized, in southwestern Arabia. It is rather surprising that Swann (*Ibis* 1923, pp. 607–610) overlooked this form as all the specimens I have seen were originally in his collection. In fact, it was these very specimens, collected by Col. R. Meinertzhagen, that led him to make a re-examination of the genus. According to Swann, “* * * the Arabian skins comprised a good series of *M. metabates*, differing only slightly from African birds of that form * * *.” I have examined a series of twenty-seven specimens of *metabates* and cannot agree that the Arabian birds are only slightly different from African ones. The size difference is very pronounced. In fact, Swann seems to have had a feeling, later apparently forgotten or changed, that the Arabian birds are different, as on the back of one of the labels he wrote “new subspecies Type.” This form has never been named. For it I propose the name

***Melierax metabates ignoscens*, subsp. nov.**

Type.—Museum of Comparative Zoology No. 92650, adult male, collected at Shekh Othman, Aden Protectorate, Yemen Province, Arabia, 19 January, 1922, by Col. R. Meinertzhagen.

Subspecific Characters.—Similar to typical *metabates* but smaller, wings (males) 278–290 as against 304–316 in African birds; (females) 304–305 as against 315–336 in African examples.

Measurements of type.—Wing 285; tail 208; culmen from cere 18.5 mm.

Range.—The Aden Protectorate, Yemen Province, Arabia.

¹*M. gabar* may be left out of consideration in this paper as its much smaller size renders it very distinct from all the others.

Material Examined.—

Melierax metabates ignoscens—4 males, 3 females, Aden, Arabia.

Melierax metabates neumanni—1 male, Abyssinia.

Melierax metabates metabates—10 adult males, 2 adult females, 2 immature males, Abyssinia; 1 male, Eritrea; 1 male, 1 female, Tanganyika Territory; 2 females, Sudan; 1 female, Kenya Colony.

Remarks.—The ranges of typical *metabates* and also of *poliopterus* are more extensive than usually thought. *M. metabates metabates* is recorded by both Swann and Sclater as ranging south to Abyssinia. However, specimens are known from Uganda (van Someren), Kenya Colony and Tanganyika Territory (specimens in Museum of Comparative Zoology, A. Loveridge, coll.). *M. musicus poliopterus* is said to occur north to Somaliland, but Dr. Mearns collected two specimens in central Abyssinia, thereby extending the known range.